In modern times, researchers have been able to collect and compare the myths, legends, and religions of cultures from around the world. They have been fascinated to discover that for centuries, people who had no contact with each other at all had passed down stories whose characters and events were strikingly similar. Many great thinkers have tried to explain this phenomenon. Noted psychoanalyst Carl Jung introduced a theory that humans have a collective unconscious, which means that there is a store of information that we, as humans, somehow hold. This collection of information includes archetypes, or symbolic figures. Archetypes influence the way we think and behave, as people follow the same patterns throughout time and around the world.

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| **Archetypal Character** | **Description** | **Examples** |
| The Hero-Vengeful Warrior | A larger-than-life character that often goes on some kind of journey or quest. In the course of his journey, the hero demonstrates the qualities and abilities valued by his culture. | King Arthur, Odysseus, Luke Skywalker, Frodo |
| The Father Figure | The protector and leader | Mufasa from *The Lion King* |
| The Mother Figure | The protective nurturer and gentle provider | Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* |
| The Fatal Woman or Temptress | A woman who uses her power (intellect, magic, or most of all, beauty) to make men, especially the Hero, weak | Circe and the Sirens in *The Odyssey*, Lady Macbeth, Morgan le Fey |
| The Witch | A woman, often a hag (though she may be disguised as a beautiful young woman), who attempts to trap and destroy the protagonist | The Wicked Stepmother in fairy tales |
| Monster/Villain | The antagonist, especially in opposition to the hero. | The Big Bad Wolf from *Little Red Riding Hood*, The Giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk* |
| The Innocent | An inexperienced male or female character that is exposed to the evils in the world | Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, Little Red Riding Hood |
| The Alter Ego or Double | Reveals the dual nature of man | Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde |
| Helpers                                                   ~ Wise Old Woman or Man                ~ Wise Animal | Characters that assist or guide the protagonist | Merlin, Yoda and Obi Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*, Grandmother Willow in *Pocahontas* |
| The Trickster/The Fool | Characters who trick others to get them to do what s/he wants – they can be both virtuous and nefarious. | Puss-in-Boots, Road Runner, Fred & George Weasley |
| The Underdog | Characters who are always in the wrong place at the wrong time, but who usually win something of value in the end. | The Ugly Duckling, The Frog Prince, Neville Longbottom |